

A Helping Hand to Immigrants: How Jews Spread Throughout the US

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1700s-early 1800s

- Partitions of Poland - Russia, Prussia and Austria 1772-1795
- Brought 900,000 Jews into Russia, over \$5MM by 1897 census
- Restricted to live in the Pale—excluding them from 95% of Russia
- Laws regulated religious and communal life, economic activities, occupations, military service, property rights, and education and imposed special taxes
- In 1827, they introduced the cantonist system- boys from 12-18 (or younger) were placed into military institutions, drafted at 18 for 25 years

Tsar Alexander II-1855-1881, a more liberal ruler

- freed the serfs and abolished capital punishment
- Ended cantonist system of removing children from their families
- Admitted Jews to high schools and universities
- Allowed some Jews to live in Moscow and St Petersburg-merchants, manufacturers, artisans, scholars or university graduates
- Upon his assassination in 1881, pogroms spread in southern Russia and Ukraine

The May Laws

- Tsar Alexander III revived restrictive laws and enacted the antisemitic May Laws
- Controlled where Jews could live, expelled from Moscow and even areas in Pale
- Forbid free movement within the Pale
- Restricted occupations
- No deeds of sale or mortgages in the name of Jews, forbidden to lease land outside of towns and to manage land
- Barred from higher education and professional institutions

Baron de Hirsch 1831-1896

- Came from wealth, grandfather was court banker to the king of Bavaria
- Received a Jewish education, but not a practicing Jew
- One of wealthiest men of his time, invested \$100 million in giving-\$3.5B today
- Built Orient Express railroad linking Western Europe with the Ottoman Empire
- Comfortable with large-scale risky projects, had a loyalty to the Jewish people
- An assimilationist – focused on moving the “ghetto Jew” to the “emancipated Jew”

Early Efforts

- Offered \$10MM to Russia for Jewish education -offer rescinded due to terms
- Proposed to Russia a plan for mass-immigration of Jews to Argentina.
- The Russian government agreed to:
 - Permit the Baron to establish local committees in Russia to assist emigrants.
 - Grant free passports to the emigrants and exempt them from the army draft.
 - Provide free or low-cost transport.

Created Jewish Colonization Association

- To assist the emigration of Jews from Europe or Asia
- To establish agricultural/commercial colonies in North and South America
- To purchase lands that could be colonized
- To establish commercial or agricultural settlements on the lands acquired.
- Created 500+ emigration committees in Russia
- Purchased land for colonies in North and South America, Mandate Palestine.
- Managed emigration bureaus, technical schools and savings and loan banks.

Why Agriculture?

- In 1804 Tsar Alexander I issued a “Jewish Statute,” the first legal framework in the world to facilitate a large-scale Jewish farming project.
- Goals - populate the recently conquered “New” Russia with white Europeans
- Offered Jews large tracts for agricultural colonization in today’s southern Ukraine and Crimea. Some land ownership rights and could form farming colonies
- Offered tax benefits and loans for settlement
- In 1890s Baron de Hirsch’s Jewish Colonization Association offered support. By WWI, these were prosperous centers for Jewish rural life, nearly 40,000 colonists
- Interwar (1923-1941) 200,000 Jews resettled in farming colonies

First Agricultural Colony – Argentina

- Argentina -desirable for its low population, land to settle, climate, liberal political environment
- Moved 10,000 Jews in the first decade, never more than 33,000 colonists.
- In 1895, about 7,500 Jews lived in Argentina, most in the colonies. By 1909, more than one third of the country’s 50,000 Jews resided in Buenos Aires.
- With 200,000 Jews, Argentina is the 3rd largest Jewish population in Americas

Jewish Immigration

- 1881 -1910 over 1.5MM Jews came to America, more than 70% from Russia.
- 1881-1924 — 2.5MM Eastern European Jews came to America
- 80% of immigrants were heading to NY (64%), PA (10%), MA (6%)
- By 1900 there were 500,000 Jews in NY. When the 1924 National Origins Act shut down immigration – NY had 1.7MM Jews, almost half of the 3.6MM in US
- Concentrated in the Lower East Side with issues of sanitation, disease and crime
- Fears of anti-Semitism

US Efforts through the Baron de Hirsch Fund

- 1891 – Trade school in NY to prepare immigrants for employment
- 1900 –Jewish Agricultural (and Industrial Aid) Society, subsidiary of the Baron de Hirsch fund
 - Emphasized self-supporting agricultural activities, supplemented with rural industry
 - Loans with favorable terms to farm cooperatives and individuals
- 1901- Industrial Removal Office relocated immigrants from New York through US
- 1907 – Galveston Plan, a project to divert European Jews immigrating to the United States from the large eastern ports of the United States to the southwestern states. The IRO established the Jewish Immigrant Information Bureau (JIIB) to place immigrants
- Galveston records at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2519/>

Trade School

- Instruction in carpentry, house and sign painting, plumbing, and the machinist's and electrician's trades
- Five and a half months to get them started as apprentices
- Center for Jewish History -Records of the Baron de Hirsch Fund
https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/3/archival_objects/1071324

Early Colonies

- Am Olam 1881, Russian Jews sought to create Jewish agricultural communities in U.S.
- Colonies in Louisiana, Dakotas, Kansas, Arkansas, Oregon, New Jersey, Connecticut
- Many faced failures due to climate, poor soil, insufficient capital, economic conditions, lack of farming experience and internal dissent.
- Alliance and Woodbine in NJ – later shifted to agro-industrial model

Agricultural Colonies

- 85% from non-agricultural occupations, over 50% had no agricultural experience
- Lacked handed down knowledge, receptive to new farming techniques
- Those in Catskills took in summer boarders to supplement their income beginning the formation of the Borscht Belt.
- In 1900, around 200-400 Jewish farming families, mostly in South NJ and Connecticut
- Post WWII, were hurt by GI Bill and disappearance of family farms, offset by Holocaust survivors becoming poultry farmers

Industrial Removal Office (records 1899-1922)

- To help Jewish immigrants assimilate into American society, relocate, find employment.
- Includes immigrant job placement, removal records, correspondence and city surveys
- Moved 79,000 Jews to more than 1000 American towns and cities
- Coordinated with local Jewish organizations to find employment and housing
- Founded and supported by Baron de Hirsch Fund, collaboration w/B'nai B'rith
- Port cities such as Boston and Philadelphia had Baron de Hirsch committees that took on job placement and other supportive functions

Industrial Removal Office Records

- Center for Jewish History has indices: <https://genealogy.cjh.org/familycollections.php>
- Ancestry for records -Card Catalog – input Industrial Removal Office – 11 series including immigrant correspondence, removal records, employer records

Results

- They organized the first secondary agricultural school in the United States
- Initiated the first credit unions
- New methods of training in trades for immigrant youth
- Education for immigrants in English and American Government
- The IRO moved 79,000 people to 1000 cities.
- Both direct and indirect (family and friends), represented 6-7% of those who came to the US.
- An additional 10,000 Jews came into Galveston

For Additional Information

Harvesting Stones: Jewish farming in eastern Connecticut - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gYg4al18dE>

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